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171729Z Feb 06

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000248

SIPDIS

STATE PASS DOE FOR DAS JBRODMAN AND CGAY
TREASURY FOR ASEVERENS AND SRENENDER
COMMERCE FOR KBURRESS
STATE PASS TRANSPORTATION FOR MARAD
STATE PASS USAID FOR GWEYNAND AND SLAWAETZ
STATE FOR DS/IP/AF, AF/EX, DS/IP/OPO, DS/ICI/PII, DS/DSS/ITA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/29/2016

TAGS: [EPET](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [KHLS](#) [PINR](#) [ETRD](#) [CASC](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: SHELL FLOWSTATION CLOSED AMID HEIGHTENED DELTA
UNREST

REF: LAGOS 233

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[¶11.](#) (U) Tensions have increased in the Delta but accounts vary widely as to what actually has occurred to spark the tension and what all this might portend. Amidst the swirl of conflicting reports, what we can relay with some certitude is that a Shell flowstation in Rivers State has closed and that there has been some military activity in the Gbaramatu area of Delta State. End Summary

Shell Flowstation Closes, Reducing Production 38,000 BPD

[¶12.](#) (U) A Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) flowstation was closed February 16 because of massive fires at its Cawthorne Channel field eliminating nearly 38,000 barrels per day (bpd) production. (Note. Cawthorne Channel is about 30 km south of Port Harcourt, Rivers State. End Note.) The fire has since been extinguished, but the flowstation will remain closed until the cause can be ascertained, according to Shell. Shell has given no timetable for this. Shell contends the fire was accidental.

[¶13.](#) (U) Press reports the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the militia that also claimed responsibility for the January hostage-taking, claimed responsibility for the Cawthorne fire. Other sources differ as to the author of the damage but indicate the fire was intentional.

[¶14.](#) (C) A Shell employee told us earlier today that the village of Nkerekoko in Delta State had suffered significant damage after being attacked today by the Joint Task Force (JTF). He said Shell had aerial photographs of the town but he did not have access to them. Community leaders from Gbaramatu continue to claim the deaths of 8-30 people due to the alleged military strikes. (Note. Nkerekoko is a village in the Gbaramatu area. End Note.) However, another source, claiming contact with Nkerekoko residents, said reports of damage in the area are greatly exaggerated. Some even said that there were no deaths and only a few injuries. A JTF officer confirmed today's military activity around the town but said only one helicopter gunship was involved and that the village was not razed. He said a militant fired an RPG at the helicopter, and the helicopter returned fire. No boat attacks or ground troop movements were planned, the JTF officer said.

MEND Threatens Shell FPSO

[¶15.](#) (C) The Shell official said the company had received a credible threat against the Sea Eagle, the Floating Production, Storage, and Offloading (FPSO) vessel, and there was some low-level violence at their Amassoma Creek facility today. At this stage admittedly passing on second-hand, if not third-hand information, he said the JTF informed Shell they were going on the offensive to curb oil bunkering and militia activity in the Delta. The Shell official said the company was expecting more attacks this weekend. (Note. The BBC reported today a call from Major-General Godswill Tamuno, a signatory of MEND press statements during the hostage crisis, who promised "total war" against the oil companies if they do not evacuate the region by midnight. End Note.)

[¶16.](#) (C) A Chevron official said his sources confirmed an aerial attack against Nkerekoko. His sources in Warri said

the JTF launched the attack as a pre-emptive strike due to reports the militants were primed to attack JTF positions in Warri soon.

Comment

17. (C) We are getting information but each new report clashes with the one just previously received. The lack of clarity and the growing piles of conflicting information are a source of consternation for us but also reveal the likelihood that the actors in the region are working in an operational fog and are likely to misjudge each other's actions. The possibility of a miscalculation cannot be discounted.

18. (C) Since Wednesday, we have seen at least two incidents of military involvement around Nkerekoko, a known militant stronghold. We have also seen a rather curious fire at a Shell facility that cut 38,000 bpd in production. Given the number of conflicting reports, it is difficult to separate fact from rumor, but at least some increased activity by the military is confirmed. The military says it is targetted at bunkering. The militias, almost all of which engage in some bunkering, are likely to see this as aimed against them. The more the military acts, the more the militias may feel pressed to make good their threats. Increased activity and a continued rise in tension is now a distinct possibility in the next few days. End Comment.

BROWNE